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ABSTRACT

The findings of a 1973 study covering the performance of Sesame Street and The Electric Company in ghetto communities are reported briefly. The steps taken to repeat the methodology of earlier Sesame Street studies are described. Data are given on: penetration of Sesame Street among preschool children in Bedford Stuyvesant, East Harlem, Chicago, and New York: frequency of viewing; loyalty to the program; Saturday viewing; viewing by older children; and mothers' assessment of the value of Sesame Street. Data from the first evaluation of The Electric Company include the number of children who have mentioned seeing the program at school and the number of preschoolers who watch it at home. (PF)

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April 10, 1973

MEMORANDUM

To: Joan Ganz Cooney - Children's Television Workshop

From: Daniel Yankelovich, Inc.

Subject: Results of the Study on the Role and Penetration of Sesame Street and the Electric Company in Ghetto Communities

The purpose of this memorandum is to report to you the top line findings of the current study covering the performance of Sesame Street and The Electric Company in ghetto communities -- Bedford Stuyvesant and East Harlem in New York, Chicago and Washington.

In the current study we have the benefit of trend data on Sesame Street in 1971 and 1970 as a bench mark. The information on the Electric Company reflects, of course, a first-time reading.

How The Study Was Conducted

In order to be able to draw statistical comparisons with previous Sesame Street research readings, we went back in the study to the same cities and the same areas as we had used previously, using, of course, different blocks and starting points than in the earlier studies.

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In other words, we were dealing with carefully matched samples. The total number of interviews completed was 1,217 distributed as follows:

Bedford Stuyvesant	344
East Harlem	270
Chicago	300
Washington, D.C.	303

As in the past, interviews were conducted only in households that qualified by having one or more children between the ages of 2 and 5 who are not in a day care center or kindergarten, and who also have a television set in working order. The main respondent was the mother of the child or the adult primarily responsible for the care of the child during the daytime.

Out of the 1,217 households interviewed, 99 percent were either Black or Puerto Rican. In 44 percent of all of these households, there was no member of the family employed. In other words, the study really surveyed the underprivileged and welfare community.

Interviewing on the study was done during the month of March, 1973. Our last previous reading was done in the late spring of 1971. All interviewing was done by trained Black and Puerto Rican interviewers. A thorough validation, both personal and telephone, was conducted to insure the authenticity of the results.

Sesame Street

Our initial assessment of the progress made by Sesame Street since the 1971 reading is based on six major criteria:

1. Penetration or the number of qualifying households which now watch Sesame Street.
2. Frequency of viewing.
3. Program loyalty, or the ability of Sesame Street to hold children's interest from year to year.
4. Regularity of Saturday viewing.
5. Viewing of Sesame Street by older children.
6. The mothers' assessment of what earlier Sesame Street viewing has meant to older children now in school.*

The results on all counts are favorable. Indeed, on the basis of other similar studies we might well by now have anticipated a levelling off or decline in Sesame Street viewing. Instead, the program has become virtually an institution with ghetto children.

1. Penetration

Penetration figures, based on ever watch Sesame Street, are as follows:

CURRENT REACH ON PENETRATION

	1973 %	1971 %	1970 %
Bedford Stuyvesant	92	77	90
East Harlem	94	86	78
Chicago	97	95	88
Washington, D.C.	67	59	32

*New question

In 1973, Sesame Street regained the franchise it had in Bedford Stuyvesant which suffered a loss in 1971 when the program went off commercial TV and was seen mainly on Channel 13. It is now back at its previous 1970 penetration levels. Penetration gains were made in Washington, D.C. where the program is still only available on UHF, and in East Harlem. The almost total penetration of the program in Chicago was maintained. The net result: gains in Bedford Stuyvesant, East Harlem and Washington, D.C.; almost total penetration in Chicago maintained.

2. Frequency

As the best measure of frequency, we have used the number of households in which Sesame Street was viewed during the same or previous day. The results are as follows:

WATCHED SESAME STREET TODAY OR YESTERDAY

	1973	1971	1970
	%	%	%
Bedford Stuyvesant	75	46	72
East Harlem	62	66	74
Chicago	70	64	57
Washington, D.C.	32	25	23

Bedford Stuyvesant, Chicago and Washington, D.C. all show significant increases in today or yesterday viewing; East Harlem holds its own. The most impressive gain has taken place in Bedford Stuyvesant where it is apparent that the Sesame Street "habit" has once again taken over.

3. Program Loyalty

One test of the continuing appeal of Sesame Street is the loyalty of the pre-schoolaged children who continue to watch the program from year to year. The significant role that Sesame Street plays in these children's lives is attested to by the fact that the majority of the children watching the program have been watching it for well over a year or more. For example, in Bedford Stuyvesant among viewing households, 72% of the mothers say that the children have been watching it for over a year. The same response is given by 63% of the respondents in East Harlem and 75% in Chicago. In Washington, D.C., where the audience has been expanding at a fast rate since its lower 1970 start, the figure is 30%.

4. Saturday Viewing

The figures for Saturday viewing are based on children who watch Sesame Street every Saturday with the viewing time ranging from less than one hour to three or more hours.

WATCH SESAME STREET EVERY SATURDAY*

	1973	1971
	%	%
Bedford Stuyvesant	65	34
East Harlem	57	58
Chicago	56	52
Washington, D.C.	17	21

*Results are based on responses from households in which the child watched Sesame Street in the last two weeks rather than "ever watch." Figures are not available for 1970.

Saturday viewing of Sesame Street has become a far greater occurence in Bedford Stuyvesant than in 1971. In the other areas, viewing has held at previous levels.

5. Viewing by Older Children

Questions were also asked about the viewing of any children in the household between the ages of six and eleven:

VIEWING OF SESAME STREET
BY CHILDREN 6 TO 11

	1973	1971
	%	%
Bedford Stuyvesant	82	80
East Harlam	94	72
Chicago	93	81
Washington, D.C.	67	78

Sesame Street continues to hold considerable attraction for younger schoolage children. As the results indicate, in households where there are both pre-school and schoolage children, the older children like to come home and watch the program during their free hours. In Chicago and in East Harlem, viewing by older children has now reached the 90% level.

6. Mothers' Assessment of What Earlier Sesame Street Viewing Has Meant to Older Children Now in School

Sesame Street has now been on the air for several years, and there is now a generation of ghetto children who were exposed

to the program in their pre-school years. This year for the first time, mothers were asked: "In your opinion do you feel that watching Sesame Street in the last few years has made any difference to your children who are now in school?" The "made a difference" group is based on the responses of the mothers, and excludes households in which someone other than the mother was present.

SESAME STREET MADE A DIFFERENCE

TO CHILDREN NOW IN SCHOOL

	%
Bedford Stuyvesant	92
East Harlem	92
Chicago	89
Washington, D.C.	84

The mothers' main answer: A strong vote of "yes."

Their main reasons: "It taught the children how to count"; "It helped them learn the alphabet and read"; "Helped to prepare them for school and made it easier"; and among Spanish speaking mothers: "It helped the children to learn English."

The Electric Company

Our top line evaluation of the Electric Company is based on three measures: the extent to which older children (6 to 11 years of age) talk about the program at home; viewing and frequency of viewing by younger children (2 to 5 years of age); the results to the question -- "Have your children who are 6 to 11 years old ever mentioned seeing the TV program The Electric Company at school?".

CHILDREN 6 TO 11 MENTIONED SEEING
THE ELECTRIC COMPANY AT SCHOOL

	%
Bedford Stuyvesant	61
East Harlem	53
Chicago	38
Washington, D.C.	24

These figures have to be studied in the context of how much the program is shown within the school system in each city, but the figures for New York City (Bedford Stuyvesant and East Harlem) strongly suggest that the program has created a stir and interest among grade schoolage children. According to the adults who have heard the children speak about the program, it is thoroughly liked by the youngsters. Some of the women report, for example that the children come home singing the theme song.

Viewing of the Electric Company By the 2 to 5 Year Olds

The Electric Company, a far newer entry than Sesame Street, has developed a broad and substantial audience among the two to five year olds, even where it runs into the same UHF problems as Sesame Street did several years ago.

VIEWING OF THE ELECTRIC COMPANY BY CHILDREN TWO TO FIVE YEARS OF AGE

	Total Ever Watch	Watched Yesterday/Today
	%	%
Bedford Stuyvesant	55	32
East Harlem	54	23
Chicago	66	36
Washington, D.C.	23	10

In New York and Chicago, the Electric Company has already reached more than one out of two ghetto households in which there is a young child (2 to 5 years of age) not attending nursery or day care centers. The figures are particularly impressive in Chicago where the program has a 66% penetration.